

Q: Good afternoon. Today is April 12th, 2018. My name is Helen Tischler. I'm here at the Newton City Hall Law Library with Reverend Howard Haywood and his wife, Katy Haywood. Together we're participating in the Newton Talks Oral History Project that's being conducted with the Newton Free Library, Historic Newton, and the Newton Senior Center. Thank you so much for being here and being willing to do this. It's wonderful. So tell us a little bit about where you're from originally--you told me a little bit earlier--how you came to live in Newton, how your folks came to live here. Why don't we start with that.

KH: Well, we were born and bred in Newton, both of us. And I am seventh-generation Newton. My great-great-grandfather was born here. And we've just been a part of the Newton fabric for all of our lives.

Q: That's amazing.

KH: Went through all the Newton Schools, started at Davis School, went to Warren Junior High School, and then up to Newton High School. It was Newton High School then, and not--

Q: Okay, not South or North.

KH: Yeah. Graduated from Newton High School in 1959.

Q: Wow. How large was the class then?

KH: I think--we were the 100th graduating class, and I believe it was 1,200 at that time.

Q: That's amazing. What part of Newton were you born in and did you live in most of the time?

KH: Well we both lived in West Newton, in the--what has always been known as a colored village--which is down behind the St. Bernard's Church.

Q: Right.

KH: In that area a lot of people don't know that we're there, but we are. So that's where we both were raised and courted and... [laughter]

Q: And did you meet at church?

HH: We met at church, yeah. We had everything together. We did school together. We're one year apart in school. So we met in church probably, Sunday school. But the church, our church, Myrtle Baptist Church, was established in 1874. And so the community--back then we'd call it The Village--was established around the church. About six little streets down there, had about 50 homes, quite a few families--multiple families living in single homes.

Q: Right.

HH: My family is here eight generations.

Q: That's amazing.

HH: My great-great-grandmother came here in 1864. At least that's what Jackson Homestead tells us. 1867, I think.

Q: Wow. That's really amazing.

HH: And she had her manumission papers. And she had--my aunt gave it to me. It was a little silk pouch, and inside was her papers that described her and let people know that she was free. She wasn't an ex-slave, she was freed by the people that--the plantation she worked on.

Q: That's amazing.

KH: Because her mother was born free.

HH: And we had--for a long time we kept them in the family, and then I started getting nervous about keeping them around the house, so we donated to the Jackson Homestead, and they've done a great job preserving them.

Q: It's wonderful. It's very valuable and unusual. And where did she come from, what state?

HH: She came from Maryland. Prince George's county, Maryland.

Q: Wow.

HH: And we looked up a lot about her. Her family came from South Carolina. And then a lot of her family was in Maryland. What we always tried to find out is why she came to Newton.

Q: Right. Yeah, how did she get here?

HH: Well, she had some relatives here, and that's where we've kind of been stuck.

KH: We just don't--yeah, we just don't know.

HH: Who she came, who were her family that was already here...

Q: Right. And--right. And so was your family involved in establishing the church?

HH: Not my family. My family--

KH: Actually it was my family. Yeah.

Q: Oh, it was.

HH: It appears that my family weren't--not until my grandfather, my father's father, was then active in the church. But before that, it doesn't appear that my family was active, at Myrtle Baptist anyway. They--my great-great-grandmother lived over in West Newton for a while, but on her death certificate it says that her address was 21 Simms Court, and that's where I grew up, that same house. Yeah, so just trying to figure out the rest of her family--

Q: Right.

HH: --where they settled. They--we know she had twin daughters, or a daughter, but we can't find out much about them, where they went after.

Q: Wow.

KH: I would just like to add too--

Q: Yes, please.

KH: --that because of the manumission papers--

Q: Right.

KH: --it was great interest in the Jackson Homestead. And they did tons of research on her, because they have access to people, museums, and information that we don't have. So a lot of the information that we have on--her name was Louisa Magruder. So a lot of the information that we have on her was gotten through the Jackson Homestead.

Q: That's really amazing. And your family, how did they get to Newton?

KH: Oh my goodness. My family--my third great-grandmother came from Henrico County in Virginia. And--that's where she was born, but when she came to Newton, she came from

Maryland. And as history tells us, she came and they moved into the West End of Boston, and they lived there for a while. But being country folks, they didn't like the city life--

Q: Right, right.

KH: They eventually moved to Newton because they had heard about Newton. And when they came, they joined the Lincoln Park Baptist Church. A lot of this history is known. It's written and documented a lot of different places--

Q: Of course. We want to hear it from your perspective, too.

KH: Okay. And they joined the Lincoln Park Baptist Church in West Newton. And I don't know if you even know where that is--it's just a little above St. Bernard's Church across from the--right at the mouth of the Turnpike.

Q: Right.

KH: So when they came here--this is my third great-grandmother and her husband and several children--they joined the Lincoln Park Baptist Church. There were other families that had been there for quite some time. We had been told that the church was very welcoming, very open and loving to them, but however they had to sit in the balcony.

Q: Uh-huh. Interesting.

KH: Yeah. They had to sit in the balcony. And I don't know if you've ever been to a black Baptist church, but our style of worship is very lively.

Q: Yes.

KH: And being from the south, a lot of the members just missed that kind of spirit, and they left the church. They had--they got what they was called dismission papers. They asked the church if--they wanted to leave. So it was a friendly--

Q: Separation.

KH: --split, when they split. And they left Lincoln Park, worshiped in different members' homes for a while, until they were able to build their own structure, which is now the Myrtle Baptist Church. But the land was donated--we can't figure out if it was donated or if it was sold to them through a clerk, a very wealthy landowner in Newton, who was a member of the Lincoln Park Baptist Church.

Q: So interesting.

KH: So that's 1874. So that's pretty much the beginning. But--

Q: Yeah. And that was through your family?

KH: Yeah, that was--yeah, that my family. But there were other families who were there before 1874.

Q: And were there any records of what their reception, the reception to them was in Boston? Why they left, not only because it was urban--was it not a friendly place?

KH: No, it wasn't that it was--

Q: Was Newton friendlier at the time, or--?

KH: No, I don't think it was unfriendly, but I think it was like the city compared to coming from the country.

Q: Yeah. Yeah. Just wondering if there was any--

KH: I mean, they were country folks and they heard of Newton, and there were a lot of abolitionists in Newton--

Q: Yes. Yes.

KH: --and a lot of opportunities for work in Newton.

HH: Yeah. A lot of job opportunities. Because Newton got the railroad around 1865, the Boston-Auburndale railroad. So a lot of foreign people from the Boston area moved to Newton, because they could take the train into Boston for work. And West Newton Hill was one of the areas where they formed--was a lot of homes and a lot of people worked in those homes, doing housekeeping and all that stuff.

A: Right. Right.

HH: And so that--those job opportunities made it a likely place for them to come. Newton back then--and a lot of people don't realize it--but even when we were kids, Newton was a perfect mix between suburban and rural. It was a lot of farms in Newton back when we grew up.

Q: So interesting.

HH: We played like we were in the country. It was much different. So for them, the people that had come from the south in rural areas, it was much more like home.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

HH: So we--everyone one of us, we had pear or apple trees, or peach trees or cherry, big gardens.

Q: That's wonderful. Large plots of land.

KH: Not necessarily. There were large plots, but ours were just--we didn't live in large plots.

HH: No. And it was--the church really stabilized the community. It was a place where no matter what was going on in people's lives outside of the community, the church was the place where

people felt safe, respected. And a lot of good things happened at that church back then.

Q: What were some of the things you remember, growing up, about the church, the neighborhood, West Newton, any events or special things that you can recall?

KH: Well for me--and I know talking to my mother, who was a church historian, and because of that we talk about it a lot and we have a lot of documentation--but the church was like the focal point. The church was--that's where you went and you met your friends there. We had a youth group at the church, and you went there because you wanted to get a little religious education but the boys were there as well.

[Laughter]

Q: Of course.

KH: I mean, a lot of couples met their spouses there.

Q: Right. That was...very important.

KH: And it was just a great experience. Yeah. And behind the church was a huge field that was--it was magical. When we were kids we would play out there. We did all kinds of--what kinds of things did we do in that field, Howard?

HH: Like I say, it's so far back--I mean, not so far back, but so different from--if I told my grandkids, if I say, "well we did go like looking for snakes and getting frogs and--"

KH: Worms for fishing.

HH: --worms for fishing and all kinds of nature things. Figuring out what things were, the different kind of wild growth that was out there. And we gave all names. We gave all those wild growths names, the weeds. Like crawling grass, I don't know if--this grass--if you walk in it it gets in your pants and grows out back.

Q: Yes.

HH: So it was a lot of that around there. Then there used to be a little green thing growing, and like there'd be foam that'd be on the outside of them. And everybody said "What is that?" And we said, "Well there's snakes over there, snake spit, that's what that is." So we made up everything. We just was very adventurous. And the Cheesecake Brook ran right through our community and that was great, because it was open up at Warren Junior High School in the back there. So we could go down in there and then crawl under and go all the way down into the village and then come up. It came up right by the railroad tracks there.

Q: That's amazing.

HH: So it was funny. And we'd play down there. It was just very dangerous, what we did. And we had one little of our kids that grew up with us. We'd call him--his name was Brian Howston--and we called him Pygmy. He was little. He was very small. He had a twin brother that was like a monster, and Brian was a little small kid. And he was like--you know the guy on TV that died, with the animals...

__: The Crocodile Hunter?

HH: Yeah! I'm telling you, he was--he like--dogs weren't afraid--he wasn't afraid of dogs. You'd see him up the street and say "Brian, what are you doing?" And he'd pull a frog out of his pocket. He had snakes in the other pocket.

Q: Wow. And that was all in the neighborhood.

HH: Really, he did. We used to go fishing. We used to go fishing at the Charles River.

Q: Where did you fish?

HH: Huh?

Q: Where did you fish?

HH: At the Charles River. We walked up there by--around where the Marriott is, where Norumbega Park was--

Q: Yes. Yes.

HH: --and also up in the recreation area, which is closed now, further south down on the river.

Q: Right.

KH: It was at the recs, right?

HH: Yeah, they called it recreation. I don't know if you all even knew that happened. There used to be a place by the run by the MBC--MDC? It was a pool.

Q: Uh-huh.

KH: Yeah.

HH: Do you remember?

Q: Yeah! Sure.

HH: And they had a big hall where you could play pinball machines, buy food and everything.

Q: That's wonderful.

HH: And they had a boat rental place there.

Q: Yes. They still have a boat rental near the Marriott.

HH: Yeah.

Q: And did you go to any of the other ponds or lakes or Norumbega or...?

KH: Oh, sure.

HH: We went to the cove. Went to the cove, Bullough's pond.

KH: The cove--we used to swim--we used to swim in the--

HH: At the cove.

KH: --we were kids.

Q: Really?

KH: Yeah.

HH: Oh yeah.

KH: You can't do that anymore.

Q: No. You can't.

HH: We'd go ice--they have it now, ice skating in the winter.

Q: Yes.

HH: But another place that we used to ice skate that people wouldn't know of is Dolan's pond.

Dolan's Reservation over in the back off of Webster Street.

Q: Right.

HH: You'd go back there, down Webster Park, and there's all Reserve back there.

Q: Right. Right.

HH: But there used to be a pond back there.

Q: And you could skate there.

HH: It's just about dried up now. And we used to go there and skate. That's where I learned how to skate, there. Because there was--it was--we'd cross the tracks and go over there.

Q: What about Bullough's Pond. Did you ever go there?

HH: Yeah. Bullough's Pond at night, I did.

KH: And we were pretty good skaters.

HH: Yeah. I--where I never went was Crystal Lake, though.

Q: No?

HH: I didn't go up there. It was like the other side of the road.

Q: Ah. Interesting.

KH: But I can remember as a kid, they would flood the backyard. They'd take a hose and flood the backyard and the ice would freeze. And that was like--at that time, that was on Cherry Street,

my parents moved after the taking of the Turnpike, which is a whole other story. But we used to skate out there and it was like the hot chocolate and the little bench...

Q: Sure. It's wonderful.

KH: Yeah. Life was--

Q: Wonderful memories.

KH: Life was pretty darn cool then. Well, it changed a lot.

Q: Yeah.

HH: We always talk about that, too, because most of us, it was very tough. My father died 41 years old. My mother didn't have an education or anything, and her story was like more normal than--the Turner family's a big family in Newton. They had 12 kids, 13--12 kids. Same with them, their father died a year from my father. Same with a whole bunch of kids still at home. And the Carter family lived on--across from us. They had 8 kids. Coopers--her relatives, the Cooper family. They had 8 kids living--I used to go over there all the time. They had--they lived in three rooms, second floor. But I'll tell you, if you asked us about how our life was, everybody would say it's great.

Q: Right. You didn't emphasize hardships.

HH: And--

KH: We were poor and didn't know it.

HH: We didn't know what poor meant. And so we had a different outlook on life. And there were some people there...I always tell people that if you ever look back and say who do you decide are your heroes--who are the people who most influenced you in your life--that it's so easy to say people who've done--accomplished things. For black people, might say Jackie Robinson, Martin Luther King, John Lewis and all that. But for me it wasn't like that, and I think for a lot of us. It was the people in that little community that--no part of life was easy. No part. The men in particular who went off and fought in the war and then came back here and couldn't get a job.

Q: Right.

HH: Or fought in wars and came back to this country on ships that were segregated, which was bizarre.

Q: I know. It's mind-boggling now.

HH: They'd get off the ship and say "Black soldiers go this way, white soldiers go..."

Q: I know.

HH: I mean, that's--I used to say how could you--how do you deal with that emotionally? How do you--

Q: Exactly. Through World War II. I mean it was Truman who finally desegregated.

HH: Right. How does that--how do you go on and be responsible and do those things you have to do after that kind of treatment. But those were--those guys were my heroes. I looked up to them--

Q: I understand.

HH: --in a big, big way.

Q: And did you have members of your family who went off to war and came back?

HH: Her father--

KH: Yeah, my dad was...World War II. He was on a--actually he was on a submarine. And he was a chef, which is really--I think they put all black--

Q: That was the job.

KH: Yeah. That was the job. However, it allowed my family, like I think that it allowed my family to have more than most.

HH: Yeah. They were rich. We--

KH: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I knew you were going--I knew it was coming to that!

[Laughter]

Q: That's why he married you!

KH: Yeah.

HH: Yeah!

KH: He married me for my father's money.

HH: Where we lived was down the road and up the road. And she lived up the road and we always used to say "Those up-the-road-ers, they think they're the [00:20:43]."

KH: No, but my life was...getting better--

HH: It was different from my life.

KH: Yeah. Again because my father was in the service, he provided a great--the income, and he traveled a lot of different places, and he always brought us back these really cool gifts. He was--so my life I think probably was a little different than most. And...

Q: What did he do when he came back from the war?

KH: Actually he ended up being a custodian--

HH: In the Newton School Department.

KH: --in the Newton School Department. I think -- you think about the--colored people were-- or black people or negroes--they were slaughtered, you would read that. And I was thinking--I'm getting off a little off the track--

Q: No, no. It's important.

KH: However, but I was thinking about--my generation of women are probably...a lot of my friends who came from the South worked in service.

Q: Right.

KH: They were maids. And that generation is dying off, because the younger generation, they're going to college and they're getting their education.

Q: Different education, different opportunity.

KH: But for the most part, that's what everybody did.

HH: That's what everybody did.

KH: That was your job--everybody. Everybody did. There was no shame in it.

Q: No, no, no.

KH: That's just what you did.

Q: It was an honest living.

HH: My brother was in World War II. My oldest brother. And he was lost from behind enemy lines for about a year. We never heard from him. And when he came back we used to try to ask him, but he never would talk too much about it. But I just how--I don't know how he did it.

KH: No, tell the story--

Q: Was he in Europe? Was he in Europe or the Pacific?

HH: He was in Europe.

KH: Tell the story about Roy.

HH: Oh, yeah. There was--he was in the 366th Infantry, it's a well-known black infantry. And they were, like I say, caught behind enemy lines and being shelled in a foxhole for like a week, some time, just in there. And finally one shell came real close, and down the line the message was "Uh oh, somebody just took one right in the face." When he said "Who was it?" They said

"Oh, a guy named Mack." So it was one of my guys that grew up with my brother in the village.

So he always thought he was dead.

Q: Oh.

HH: And he came home and he survived, with his whole face restructured. And he made it.

Q: He did make it. That's amazing. And did you--after you finished high school, what did you end up doing? Did you go off to college, did you--?

KH: Well, I went off--yeah, I didn't live in Newton all my life. I snuck off for a couple years. I didn't have--no idea what I wanted to do when I got through high school. And my mother, who wasn't a licensed hairdresser, but she did people's hair in the kitchen on Saturdays--

Q: Right.

KH: And she thought--now I'm a twin, mind you. I have to tell you that I have a twin sister.

Q: Oh! Interesting.

KH: And she said, "You guys, maybe you'd like to go to beauty school." So she did research and we ended up living in New York, in 1959, for two years, which was--that was huge then.

Q: Yes.

KH: To send your girls off to--

Q: Yes. Absolutely. They did not leave the home. Right.

KH: --the big city. Yeah. Yup. So she sent us off to New York. We lived in Harlem for a while, and we lived in the YWCA. We were talking about just this--we live in the past now. We're old. So you're talking about the fun times, the good times. And we lived in the Y in New York City. My mother had called ahead to the director of the Y, tell them what was expected and this is what--they would look out for us.

Q: Right.

KH: We were such country bumpkins. We wouldn't know trouble if it came and grabbed us by the collar. We just--because there were two of us, it wasn't that difficult.

Q: Right. Right.

KH: We just kind of had each other. Best experience. That's why I encourage kids to go away to college. Don't stay local. Go away.

Q: Right. Right. But you had no thought of staying away. You wanted to come back.

KH: No I didn't.

[Laughter]

KH: No. I didn't. My mother got a phone--

Q: Your mother insisted.

KH: Yeah. Yeah. She said "It's time to come home." My twin had come home earlier. She was a little less adventurous.

HH: A little! Yeah.

KH: She came home earlier and then I was--I never graduated from school because I was having way too much fun.

Q: Sounds like a wonderful experience. So did you have other siblings, or...?

KH: Yes I did. I have two brothers and two sisters. My twin and I are the oldest.

Q: And did everyone stay in Newton?

KH: Well, actually no. My sister actually right now--my youngest sister--lives in Richmond, Virginia. But everybody else stayed local. We used to talk about when we were younger, "Let's go and leave Newton! Let's join the Peace Corps!" We wanted to get out of Newton and find out what else was out there in the world.

Q: Right.

KH: Never happened. So we're Newton spoiled brats.

HH: They don't live in Newton, though.

Q: Oh. Where--

KH: Oh, no. They don't live--we stayed in Newton.

Q: You stayed in Newton. But where did they--

KH: But they didn't go far. Ashland, one's in Ashland. Two brothers in Boston. And of course there's my sister in Richmond.

Q: So you have them close by. And what about your family, Reverend? How many were in your family?

HH: There were four of us. Four boys. I was the youngest. All--three of us lived in Newton after, after we were married. One lived in Natick. My two oldest brothers passed away. I have one left, he's in Florida now. He's a retired Newton police officer. Like everything else, first in Newton, the first black sergeant on the police force.

Q: Right.

HH: It's like, from the church came the first principal of a Newton school. The first detective on the police force. The first fireman. They get a lot of them--the first, the first--"

KH: In the black community.

Q: Sure. Sure. In the black community.

HH: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. All lived in that little place. There's a picture there of one of the--the baseball team they had, made of guys just from that little community, that won the Newton city league championship. You would never think that they could.

Q: Amazing. I would like to see that photo.

HH: But probably three of those guys could be--could have made the majors if they were accepted.

Q: Right. Right.

HH: My brother was just talking about it last week. One man who was particularly good, Sam McClary. Remember he said Sam had retired. And he was like 45, and decided to play--come back and play a game. Walter said the first time he got up, he hit a ball up the [00:28:12] so far they couldn't find the ball.

Q: Wow. That's amazing.

HH: He was a great ballplayer.

Q: That's amazing.

HH: And so those type of things we always had to be proud of in our little community, so it was a stabilizing place. So that always makes us come to the...okay...now the turnpike comes.

Q: Uh-huh. And that changed things.

KH: Yes.

HH: So it's...can't believe that they're gonna take our homes. I remember trying to sit at the kitchen table, trying to tell my mother, "Ma, they're gonna take--" She said, "What do you mean, they can't...I've got my deed," she said.

Q: Yeah. So--

HH: I said--we told--my brothers were told well they could do it. So when I think about it, in the overall picture, was it good or bad? For some reasons it was bad, but for a lot of the reasons it was good. It helped us understand that we had a bigger world to live in.

Q: So you did lose your home, then?

HH: No. This little small utopia wasn't gonna last forever. That we had to--

Q: Right. But the Pike, did the Pike displace you?

KH: We both lost our homes because of--

HH: Yeah.

Q: Was it by eminent domain?

KH: Yes.

Q: They didn't pay you?

HH: They paid.

Q: Oh, they did?

HH: But they didn't have the rules they have now, like relocation costs and everything.

Q: Right.

HH: They just gave an estimated amount that they thought it was valued at. That was it.

Q: How much notice did they give you?

HH: Well, the best thing was to hold out. What happened was the people who took--they scared--they literally scared you.

Q: Of course.

HH: They went to people individually and told them, "Hey, we're gonna be here next week." And they took less money. And not one person, not one family, that took those early offers were able to relocate in Newton, because it was not enough money.

Q: It was too expensive to--

HH: So after [00:30:24] there was 13 of us--said, "We're gonna join together. And we're gonna say 'We're not going.'"

Q: Good.

HH: And so when Callahan--I'll never forget, Callahan came himself and said "Well, we're ready to make 'em." We just said--we decided we don't--we're not going. You'll have to tear down the house with us in it, we're not going. And then they started changing, making better offers, a lot better offers. For some people it was like double.

KH: Which allowed them to purchase homes.

HH: And then the trouble was finding a place to go.

Q: Of course.

HH: We wanted to stay in Newton.

Q: Right.

HH: And most real estate companies would not show us homes. So there was a group of people that got together and on their own started finding families that said "We would sell our homes to black people."

Q: Okay.

HH: And so that's how we got our house. It was through word of mouth, it wasn't through real estate.

Q: It was word of mouth. And what neighborhoods were you able to look in?

HH: They moved to Cherry Street in West Newton, and we moved to--our family moved on Walker Street in Newtonville, and we still live there.

Q: Right. Right. And there were neighborhoods that would not let you look?

HH: It wasn't so much neighborhoods, it was realtors.

Q: It was the realtors didn't let you.

HH: It was realtors, yeah.

Q: Unbelievable. What year was that?

HH: '63, '64, '65. We were all gone by '64. End of '65. We moved on a Friday--Saturday? Friday. Yeah. And I went to work on Monday and I came back, every house on our street was gone.

Q: Really.

HH: On Hicks Street. And my house.

Q: That's unbelievable.

HH: I lived on the little small Simms Court, there was only four houses on our street. My grandfather owned three of those houses.

Q: And then it was all gone.

HH: Two of them were gone, and one is still remaining. And her--she lived on Hicks Street, which is the main street that had mostly all the homes. Every house-- every house.

KH: I tell the story--we lived on Walker Street at the time, and I had a young child, and I decided--I knew the houses were being demolished and I decided that "Let me take a walk down through Hicks Street and just see what's going on, what's gone and what's still there." And just as I approached my house, the ball was going through my house. And it just knocked me to my knees. I can see that like it was yesterday. I just--oh! Just devastating.

Q: Unbelievable.

KH: Just devastating. And what we did do actually is in 2012, we commemorated the taking of the homes with--this is a 50th reunion, and we invited everybody back, and oh my goodness, that was special.

Q: And so how many people turned up for that?

HH: 400 people.

Q: Really? That's amazing.

HH: I could--we started off just a few of us and I said, "Well, listen, let's send out an email and see if anybody's interested." And people said "Yeah, yeah, maybe." And so then we got a little committee together and said "Well, what are we gonna do?" We said "Well, we're gonna have a welcoming," and then we'd have--the next day we'd have an outing and cookout on the playground where the church used to go twice a year and have that. So everybody was used to that. And then that night we had a banquet at Post 440.

KH: Amazing event.

Q: That sounds amazing.

HH: But we didn't have any money, and we didn't have any, so we said, well if the committee would chip in their money first, then we'd have some working funds. Everybody on the

committee chipped in, and we started telling people "Send in your money, we're gonna do it."

And I tell you--

Q: And 400 showed up with families and--

HH: I couldn't--

Q: That's amazing.

HH: That was the--I mean, I was sick when it happened, I got--I--right before the--I had knee surgery. And I was in a lot of pain, but I tell you, that was the--that was--I couldn't believe it.

Q: You wouldn't miss that.

HH: The day we had the cookout, people were--it was a bunch of us there, but all afternoon, more and more and more.

Q: Isn't that amazing?

HH: People hadn't seen each other in 20, 30 years. It was--

Q: That's fabulous.

HH: It was--

KH: I just cried all day.

Q: And all the kids. And the families! Of course! Yeah, that's amazing.

KH: It was so emotional.

Q: And it's great, you've got the book. I really want to look at that before you guys leave.

KH: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: And so your children were raised later on in this other house that you were in.

KH: Yes. They don't have--they have no recollection. We can't even begin to tell them what our life was like, although from time to time they would say "I wished I had grown up then," or "I wished I had grown up there." Because life was--after we left the village--life was very, very different.

Q: Very different. How was it different for them, growing up? How had it changed in the schools, the neighborhood you were in?

KH: That we were in? Well, we were in the--our neighborhood--if you have kids, you have support.

Q: Yes.

KH: Kids bring families together.

Q: Yes.

KH: And so they had really, really good friends on our street, and then kids in school. So that part of it was okay for them. I don't know, it was just--I mean it was just different. You can't really compare it.

HH: Well that's what I was saying about the good and the bad of it. You can't live isolated like that. There's a whole lot of people out there they're gonna have to deal with at some time in their life. You don't learn--I remember we used to always--I mean, we were really protective of the village. I mean, to an extreme. If people--especially me, I was like the--what do you call me? But--

Q: Guardian.

KH: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. "Oh, don't drive down that street too fast."

HH: If you drive--like, driving too fast on the street, or--

Q: Good for you.

HH: --stealing stuff--

KH: He would stop right in the middle of the street.

Q: It's like a neighborhood watch before it was popular.

KH: Yes! Yes. Exactly.

HH: Yeah. We knew how to catch you. And so that part of it was good. I mean, you go to school, you'd be in all-white--a lot of classes you'd be the only Black in the class and everything like that. But when you got home, soon as you walked down Hicks Street, you felt different.

Q: Sure. It was your home.

HH: I'm in charge here.

KH: This is my territory.

HH: This is my place. And so if you're gonna come down here and act up, you're gonna be in trouble. So that part of it was good, I think.

Q: Yeah.

KH: Yeah, no, it was. It was home. It was--

Q: It was--

HH: And we had people there that like taught the kids the...

KH: Black history...

HH: Yeah, and poetry, and--they say you wouldn't get--there was a lady named Bessie Hipkins. And she had suffered a really terrible car accident. She got hit by a car. She was all bent and deformed and everything. But she was--she loved the classics. Shakespeare and all kinds--Langston Hughes and stuff. And she would teach the kids about it. Just on her own. Just have the kids come over her house and she would talk to them and stuff like that. And we had a broom factory. I don't know if you ever heard of Reverend Louis E. Ford. He was a pastor at Myrtle for 33 years. And he was a master broom-maker. And he built a little factory right on Hicks Street. And him and his wife worked there together. They used to build--make brooms, sell them to S.S. Pierce, was his main customer. But it was that kind of--

KH: The character of the community was just--

HH: Yeah, the character was--the character in that village--

KH: The good guys, the bad guys, and everything else in between.

Q: Yeah. It's really amazing. Sure. It was your big extended family.

HH: Yeah.

Q: And did your kids end up in Newton? Did they have the same positive feelings?

HH: Well, I have--my oldest is a daughter, she's 52. You'd have to drag her out of Newton.

[Laughter]

KH: Kicking and screaming.

HH: Really. She's a single mom, and she's not had it easy. Just a couple years ago it looked like she was gonna probably have to move. It would have been--

KH: Devastated. She couldn't have handled it.

HH: Yeah. I don't think so. She loves this place.

KH: She was able to--she was able to stay.

Q: She was able to stay. And what was their experience in the Newton schools? You mentioned sometimes you were the only black person--African American.

HH: By that time they had METCO, for one thing.

Q: Right, right.

KH: Kristy had a really pretty--my daughter--she's kind of sensitive, and I can't say she was shy, but she was sensitive. But I know she was at Horace Mann and according to her the kids are calling her names and she would come home crying and we would have to go down to the school, talk to the school psychologist. And what they told us was the thing that I didn't like--they told us, "Well, you know, if you had red hair maybe they'd keep calling you 'red' or 'carrot top,' it's no different."

Q: No. No.

KH: And we had to tell them it is different!

Q: Yes. It is different.

KH: It's very, very different! So we ended up as a matter of fact taking her out of the Horace Mann School--

Q: Oh, you did.

KH: --and she ended up going to Warren Junior High School. So it didn't make sense to have one kid here and one kid there, so both of my kids graduated from Warren Junior High School. We just took her out and she made new friends and flourished and--

Q: And then it was okay. And which high schools did they go to? Which high school?

HH: North.

Q: Newton North?

HH: Yeah.

Q: And that experience was okay?

KH: Yeah--yeah, no it was.

HH: My son's personality was so much different from my daughter's. He was able to deal with issues much better than her. And he had a lot of friends. So I don't--he didn't have any problems.

KH: I don't think Kristy did either.

HH: No.

KH: The one thing I can say about my kids is they had a good circle of friends.

Q: Right. Right.

KH: Friends that they--as a matter of fact they're good friends even today. So they had a really good circle of friends. So they--I believe--my son is just this gregarious--he collects people. But I can't say that they had a bad experience at high school.

Q: Okay.

HH: I tell you, we--it's funny now because they--my oldest friend, the person I remember as making friends with, is--we're still friends now--we met, we were four years old. My mother--our mothers were signing us up for kindergarten.

Q: That's amazing. Okay.

HH: And he--we met them, and we went all through high school. Then he got married--he got married early, before we did, and we got married early.

Q: How old were you when you married?

HH: I was 21.

KH: I was 20. In those days you were considered an old maid if you weren't married--no I'm serious! If you weren't married by the time you were 20 people started looking at you like, "What, you can't find a husband? What's wrong?" A lot of my friends--

Q: So just in time for you.

KH: Yeah. Married right out of high school. We waited a couple years.

HH: Yeah when we got married, her mother almost had to be hospitalized.

Q: But she knew you and liked you I'm sure.

HH: No, no, no. She knew me, she knew me, and that was the problem!

KH: She knew him and she didn't like him.

HH: That was the big problem! And so we eloped.

Q: Did you?

HH: Yup.

Q: Really? So where did you elope to? Where did you get married? I know we only have a few more minutes, but this is--

KH: We got married in Medford by the Justice of the Peace, actually.

Q: And it lasted all this time. So you grew on her mother.

KH: Oh yeah!

HH: Yes.

KH: Did a whole flip.

Q: Good.

HH: We've been married 56 years this month--couple of weeks.

Q: That's beautiful. That's wonderful. It's so fascinating. I mean, we could go on and on if you had the time. Is there anything you want to add to this that you'd like to sum up with, or something you would like people to remember about your experience?

HH: Well, I think I always said, she thinks that probably I should be working for the Welcome Wagon for Newton. I love this place, I really do. And people ask me why, I say there's a lot of good reasons: the schools, the opportunities we had. When I was a kid, when people say "You didn't have anything," we didn't have anything. We didn't have anything. We had the playgrounds. In the mornings in the summertime you could go to any of the playgrounds and it was supervised. You never paid money. I didn't know--I went to camp for West Newton Community Center. I don't--I know my mother didn't have no money to pay. All these opportunities we had, the skating at the Cove, and summer programs and teachers that would guide you some through school. It's just--it's a wonderful place.

Q: Good memories.

KH: It's a wonderful place to raise your kids, the school system--

HH: And I think sometimes people undervalue the human resource that we have here. Not the--

Q: Right.

HH: Yeah, it's a very rich place, a very affluent place, but it has a better riches. It has a riches of humanness that we sometimes don't value enough. So that when people care about each other, it makes a difference!

Q: Yes. It really does.

HH: It makes your life more vibrant, more anything to know people love and care about you. We [00:45:08] along with some of the bad stuff too, but--

A: Right. But overall you have good memories.

HH: Yes.

KH: Very. Very.

Q: Did you want to add anything, Katy?

KH: No, I think Howard--

Q: That was wonderful.

A: Yeah, I think Howard said it all.

Q: You did great.

KH: I just want to add about Howard is he's a political junkie, and he's involved in the city of Newton everything that comes down the pike that's of interest and of benefit to the community. He's there. He's right there.

Q: Well thank you so much for volunteering to do this and participating.

END OF INTERVIEW